

# national news

## Gay old party

Gay and lesbian Republicans gathered in July to hand out kudos, hash out priorities for 2000

by Bob Roehr

**H**ow times have changed. Arizona Republican U.S. Rep. Jim Kolbe's July 26 keynote address during the Log Cabin Republicans national convention came a year and a day after the congressman was essentially forced to publicly acknowledge his homosexuality in response to an impending magazine article that would have outed him.

A year later Kolbe is more than a little out, as his address before the national gay and lesbian GOP group—which was carried on C-SPAN—demonstrated.

The Log Cabin convention was held in the nation's capital July 23-27. With the theme of "Building the Big Tent," more than 300 activists gathered to focus on increasing the size, strength and political muscle of Log Cabin at the local, state and national levels.

"The cause for gay Republicans and gay Democrats will be advanced when gays and lesbians act like straight people," he said, "not when we go back into the closet, for we will never do that, but when we demonstrate our concern and our commitment, our expertise and our execution, on issues that matter to Main Street America. Who says crime is not a gay issue? Of course it is. It's everybody's issue. And the sooner we speak to it—and similar issues—the sooner we speak to Middle America, the sooner we enter the mainstream of American politics."

Kolbe added, "When we speak to these broader concerns, when we talk to fellow Republicans

about the everyday concerns of their families, are we denying our sexuality? I would answer emphatically, no."

He cited the example of how Jackie Robinson broke down the color barrier in baseball.

"It wasn't because Jackie Robinson held frequent press conferences, or made speeches, or participated in boycotts. It was because he played baseball, and he played it well," said Kolbe. The congressman's constituents seem to agree, and last fall re-elected him with 70 percent of the vote.

During his 13 years in Congress, Kolbe has become known for his expertise on free trade, and his general Republican philosophy is of "less government, lower taxes and more individual responsibility."

During his speech, Kolbe made some stinging remarks about the current gay and lesbian rights movement.

"Why is it that as gay Republicans, we have allowed gay Democrats, largely committed to the collectivist state, to speak for gay and lesbian rights? Why are the ones committed to expanding government control over our lives in housing and education, the ones who would nibble at our freedom through use and abuse of

the tax code and regulatory system—why, how, are they presumed to speak for gay rights?" Kolbe said.

Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.), meanwhile, received the Spirit of Lincoln Award for his "leadership on gay rights and AIDS funding."

He spoke about the discrimination that his Italian American family faced a generation ago, of how his uncle anglicized his name to find employment, while his father, who kept his name, suffered discrimination.

D'Amato reiterated his support for gay men and lesbians in the military and the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, a federal bill which seeks to prohibit employment discrimination based on sexual orientation, of which he is an original cosponsor.

Youth activist Jamie Nabozny, a gay Republican, received the Courage of Lincoln Award for his successful fight against a Wisconsin public school district which permitted anti-gay harassment and abuse against him while he was a student.

Nabozny noted he has also been the target of intolerance from gay and lesbian people over the fact that he is a member of the GOP.

Beltway pundits were also on hand during the convention.

Political observer Doug Bailey said Ralph Reed's skill at "taking off some of the rough edges" of the Christian Coalition helped to make it very effective, though he sensed that "as a monolithic political force they are at their apex" and may begin to slip.

Charles Cook of the *Cook Political Report*, meanwhile, took a swipe at U.S. Rep. Linda Smith (R-Wash.), a darling of the Christian Coalition, who is challenging Patty Murray for her Senate seat.

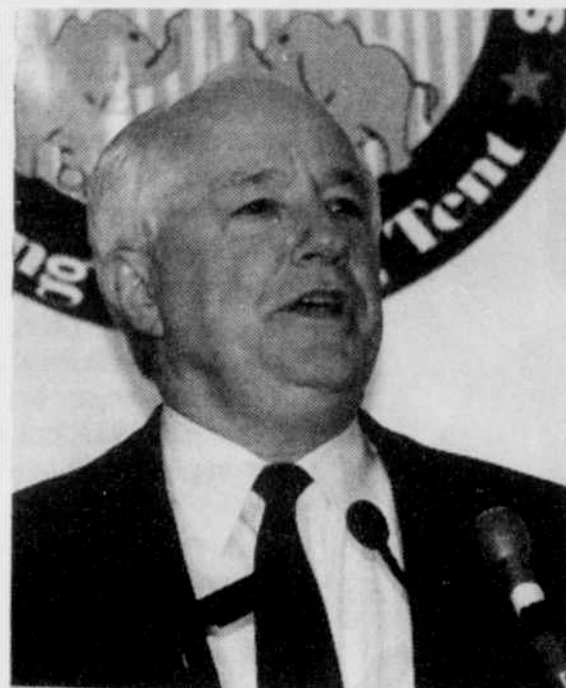
"There is a general feeling that [Smith] is crazy...practically certifiable," he said. "One of the things in this world that is dangerous to do is to get into a fight with someone who is nuts, because there is nothing that they won't do."

The convention delegates also passed a number of issue-related resolutions, including a call for the GOP to remove anti-gay planks from its party platform in 2000, and for state legislatures to repeal sodomy laws.

Delegates also voted to commend the GOP congressional leadership on AIDS funding and advancing ENDA.

One resolution on abortion rights, which passed by a 98-38 vote, called on the GOP "to officially take a neutral stance on the issue of choice."

During the debate, resolution backers maintained that passage would not alter Log Cabin's neutral position on abortion, and that the organization would continue to be equally inclusive of pro-choice and anti-abortion gay men and lesbians.



Jim Kolbe

### Carpenter honored, Keene elected to board

Oregonians made their presence felt during the Log Cabin Republicans national convention.

State Rep. Chuck Carpenter, the Oregon House's only openly gay GOP member, was honored with the LCR Leadership Award for his tireless work this past session to advance legislation prohibiting employment discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Carpenter, who represents the Portland area, boldly took on GOP leadership to move Oregon ENDA, of which he was the chief sponsor.

Some fancy, and unexpected, parliamentary maneuvering by Carpenter and fellow GOP Rep. Jim Hill of Hillsboro got the bill through the House—for the first time in two decades of attempts—with an impressive 40-20 vote.

Though Oregon ENDA was ultimately killed in the Senate, the measure's progress, and Carpenter's instrumental role, were widely noted and applauded.

During the LCR gathering, Carpenter discussed his Oregon ENDA experience and emphasized the importance of building a strong coalition with his gay and lesbian Democratic colleagues.

"Civil rights should not be a partisan issue in the gay community," he said.

Carpenter also acknowledged that he is pondering a run for Congress.

Oregon ENDA wasn't the only ENDA of interest during the convention. Portland attorney Jerry Keene, who was elected to LCR's national board (after being appointed last year), says he met with Oregon Republican U.S. Sen. Gordon Smith while in D.C.

"Gordon reaffirmed his support for [federal] ENDA," Keene tells *Just Out*. "Previously he said

he would support it and he simply restated that."

Last September, the U.S. Senate defeated ENDA by a single vote. The bill was reintroduced earlier this year.

Keene says he and Smith also chatted about the possibility of a Carpenter congressional bid.

"He respects Chuck a lot," says Keene.

Carpenter, you may recall, took enormous flak from members of the gay and lesbian community when he endorsed Smith during Smith's campaign for the U.S. Senate.

Clem Knorr, who was recently elected chairman of Log Cabin Oregon, says the convention's closing ceremony "brought tears to my eyes and was the most moving and uplifting experience in my life as a gay man."

Knorr says he spent "40 years deeply in the closet," finally coming out this year at the age of 57.

Inga Sorensen Chuck Carpenter



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